Will Graham, Unexpected Company and the Very Nice Day

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Will Graham, Unexpected Company and the Very Nice Day

by Azure_K_Mello

Summary

Pretending to be Hannibal's boyfriend was hard because it was so easy. But nice people to eat meals with, comfortable weather and a head that doesn't hurt can change any mood for the better. Follows Alcohol is Never the Answer.

It was so easy, incredibly easy to pretend he was Hannibal's boyfriend. The plan went perfectly: Hannibal needed a fake boyfriend and Will could pretend to be anyone. He could think like anyone and get into anyone's mind.

The woman was the last patient of the day on Hannibal's late Wednesday night. It was Will's old time slot. He wore nice black pants and a shirt that wasn't flannel because Hannibal's partner wouldn't wear flannel. He waited until twenty minutes after the session had begun and then walked in through the patients' exit. As he opened the door he said, "Hannibal, it's almost eight and oh-" He stopped as he saw the woman.

"It's Wednesday, Will, my late night."

"Oh," Will repeated. "I thought you were just taking notes, lost in your work. I was going to tell you off for being late in coming home. I am so sorry," he said to the woman. "I'm Hannibal's partner, Will." She shook his hand without offering her name. To Hannibal he said, "I caught a beautiful trout so don't grab something to eat before coming home. I'll take the dogs for a walk and meet you in the kitchen in two hours."

"Ah, the dogs."

"You love our dogs."

"I love you," corrected Hannibal.

Will didn't miss a beat as he said, "Do we have arugula? I wanted to make a nice light potato salad but I couldn't find arugula in the fridge." Will wasn't entirely sure what arugula was — other than leafy — but it seemed like the sort of thing Hannibal's boyfriend would know.

"I moved it to the second drawer down."

"Ah, that would explain it," Will kissed his cheek, "See you in a couple of hours." He smiled at the woman, "Sorry again."

He left and drove home, listening to music Hannibal would not like — music Will didn't even really like — dwelling on the concept of commitment and domesticity. When he imagined himself as a killer he was separate once he left the scene. It lingered with him, haunted his dreams and hurt his head, but it wasn't him. This character, the headspace, was built off Will. It would have been easier if he hadn't talked about the trout, the dogs. And he shouldn't have kissed Hannibal. He knew that playing Hannibal's lover was a bad idea. If the murderers lingered with him what would this do? At least it might improve his dreams. Usually he built forts but he would need a full fortress — with a moat — to make it through this.

He got a headache as he drove and he wasn't sure if it was the encephalitis playing up, reminding him it could come back with a vengeance, or if it was just his thoughts. He drank a bottle of water that was cold despite sitting on the passenger seat in the sun. The weather was still chilly and Will was grateful for it. At home he paid no attention to his nice pants as he

knelt to stroke the dogs. They were a huge comfort to him. He changed into a comfortable shirt, jeans, shrugged on a warm coat and whistled for them. Then they went out and tromped through the woods. His dog never needed leashes as they never went far, having been abandoned by their first masters they liked to remain close to their second.

At home he showered and took his pills, longing for a time when they would be unnecessary, longing for a time when his mind would be fully his. But, as Jack kept bringing him bodies, that might not be possible. He put on sweats and a t-shirt. Back in the living room he studied the house phone but decided to leave his dad alone. At some point he needed to stand on his own two feet. And what could he say to a man who thought he was already dating Hannibal; he couldn't lie to his dad. He could let his dad believe something incorrect but actually lying was beyond him.

Instead he went to the kitchen. He put water and eggs on to boil, salting the water. He started to microwave the potatoes. He'd cleaned the fish right after he pulled it out of the water but now he filleted it quickly.

There was a knock at the door. He sighed and knew who it was. He didn't want to see Hannibal right now, mostly because he did want to see him. He went to the door and opened it saying, "So did it work?"

"Quite well, she was much more amenable to discussing a referral and I have set her up with a doctor I think she'll like."

"Not too much, I hope."

"The new doctor is a woman. She'll never make any progress if she becomes so focused on her doctor."

"Come in," said Will.

Hannibal nodded to the knife in Will's hand, "I'm not sure I'm comfortable."

Will laughed, "I'm cutting up a trout."

"I brought arugula," said Hannibal lifting the bag.

"Ah," said Will, "Do I have to cook this? Is it like spinach where you can have it raw or cooked? Or is it a garnish?"

"Cooked or raw is fine."

"Are you going to actually eat something I cook?"

"I think so, yes."

Will smiled as he walked into the kitchen. "Water, coffee, milk or orange juice?"

"Water, I think."

He poured Hannibal a glass of ice water and went back to what he was doing. He cut the potatoes into smaller pieces. In a pan he fried bacon with garlic in a little olive until it went crispy. He rinsed the arugula and he tasted a leaf. It was nice. He added a few handfuls of the leaves to the pan and stirred it in, letting it get warm before adding the potatoes.

“Is there anything I can do to help? I feel out of place not cooking.”

“Do you want to cook? You’re more than welcome to relax; I have everything under control.”

“I’d like to help.” Hannibal moved to wash his hands.

“Okay,” Will grabbed a lemon and mustard from the fridge, he cut the lemon in half and handed one half to Hannibal. He put the salt, pepper and olive oil down next to it with a dish, a lemon reamer and a whisk, “If you could make the dressing that would be great. I won’t be insulting and tell you the ratios.”

Hannibal laughed and set himself to work as Will took the salad off the heat and dumped it into a big bowl. He pulled the eggs from the water with tongs and turned the ring off as he set the eggs aside to cool. Then he turned his full attention to the fish. He seasoned it and put a little butter into a pan before he cooked it fast. Hannibal turned his attention to peeling the eggs, not seeming to notice that they were piping hot. “Do these go into the salad?”

“Yeah, they’ll be a little wet in the center. They’re not soft boiled but they aren’t hard either.”

“Shall I cut them right into the bowl?”

“Yes please,” his kitchen smelled divine and the dogs came in to sniff Will said, “Out, boys, not now.” He heard Harry whine but they left. “Fish, eggs or meat and they have a hard time staying out.”

“They’re so well trained,” Hannibal said.

“Well, seven dogs in a house this size: they’d better be well trained.” Will threw a smile to the man over his shoulder, “Would you grab plates, please?” Hannibal passed him plates and Will transferred the fish to them.

“Should I toss this salad or does it need some presentation?”

Will laughed, “Really, Hannibal? Do you think I do plating? Throw on the dressing and mix it all together.”

“I didn’t want to presume; I haven’t seen you cooking before.”

“But you know me,” said Will. He squeezed lemon over the fish then said, “Oh, do you like lemon on your fish? I wasn’t really thinking.”

“I always feel a meal should be served as the chef prefers. A meal should be cooked correctly and you know how it should be served. So, yes, I like lemon on this fish.”

Will smiled, “Grab forks and knives please.”

Hannibal got the cutlery and refilled their water glasses as Will brought the plates and salad to the table. He served them both from the salad bowl. “I’m sure this would go better with wine but water pairs with everything.”

“It does,” agreed Hannibal. He took a bite of his salad and then sighed.

“Good sigh or bad sigh?” asked Will.

“Delicious, Will.”

“Good, try the fish.”

Hannibal took a bite and considered it before he said, “Truly delicious.”

Will smiled, “The secret to good fish is to pull it out of the water alive no more than five hours before cooking it and then not to overcook it. It’s not hard.”

“Now have you been feeding yourself or did you just do this because you knew you had a guest coming?”

“I didn’t know I had a guest coming,” said Will feeling confused.

“You asked for arugula,” replied Hannibal.

“No, your pretend boyfriend asked for arugula. I didn’t know what it was. I didn’t know you were coming for dinner.” He saw the look on Hannibal’s face and retraced the conversation. He realized where he went wrong. Friendship was a two way street. It wasn’t just that he didn’t like people it was that people didn’t like him. Social settings had always been difficult for Will. Hannibal was embarrassed because he had thought he was an invited diner guest and now his tactless host was telling him he was an interloper. He thought about backpedaling but Hannibal was too smart for that so he said, “I’m very glad we got our wires crossed. Meals are nicer shared when the company is pleasant. And I got to cook for you which I didn’t think would happen. If I’d known you were coming I would have bought wine. That’s the only thing that would have changed.”

Hannibal seemed to relax a little as he said, “Do not buy wine on my account. This is a mostly dry house. I come to you with full knowledge of that. Don’t change habits that allow you to avoid addiction for anyone. As you say: water pairs with everything.”

“I am glad you came,” Will said.

“That’s good, because with food this delicious you would have a hard time getting me to leave this chair.” After a pause he said, “If I might ask: if you were intending to eat alone, why were you making such a lot of salad?”

“When my dad made this we would always have it cold for breakfast the next morning. But with the arugula that wouldn’t work. Day old wilted vegetables make me think of collard greens and growing up poor in the south. I hate them but I ate them.”

“Too polite to say no?”

Will shook his head, “You ate what was on your plate. We never went to bed hungry. Sometimes we couldn’t afford electricity but my dad always made sure we had enough to eat but we never had too much to eat. Sometimes neighbors’ wives would think we were charity cases and cook and they always made collard greens. I think they’re disgusting but they were what was for dinner. I like this, it’s fresh and just done but tomorrow it wouldn’t be as good. Very few vegetables should be cooked for two and a half hours… I can’t actually think of one.”

“No, nor I. Though I’ve never had collard greens.”

“Be glad,” said Will. “I can’t be ungrateful though; they did cook for us out of kindness.”

Hannibal actually licked his fork after he emptied his plate and said, “Wonderful dinner, Will.”

“Good, I’m glad you liked it. Sadly, there’s no dessert but would you like coffee?”

“Coffee would be lovely.”

Will took their plates to the sink and washed his hands before getting the pot of coffee from the cupboard. He got his grinder out and said, “The dogs will come. They think the noise of the grinder is fascinating.” He put the kettle on and ground the coffee. The dogs skittered in to watch him. He smiled at the predictability of it as Calvin came and stood, using Will’s leg as a balance for his front paws, to get a better look at the grinder. He dumped the coffee into the French press and poured the water over the freshly ground beans. He let it steep and looked out across the yard. The snow was still thick on the ground. “How cold was the house when I was really sick? When you set up the air conditioners?”

“It was in the mid forties.”

“Sorry, that must have been really uncomfortable for you.”

“It was fine, Will. You were ill and I was far more concerned about your comfort than mine.”

“Thank you, you should take them back: you’ll need them in a couple of months.”

“I have central air,” Hannibal said. “I procured them for you.”

“Oh… thanks. I didn’t realize.”

“Consider them your last piece of medical treatment from me.”

“Thank you,” Will repeated. He depressed the plunger on the press and brought it to the table. He grabbed the milk and sugar, spoon and mugs. He poured them both mugs and passed one to Hannibal with a spoon. Hannibal sometimes took coffee black, other times he doctored it. Will had seen him do it many times. Will always drank his coffee black. Hannibal took a sip and let it linger on his tongue then he put the spoon down.

“Have you found a boat yet?”

“No. I haven’t had any time to go on the internet and look. I will though; I think it’s good advice.”

“You could look tonight,” Hannibal said.

“I don’t have a computer.”

“Really? I didn’t see one when I was here but I assumed that you were simply too ill to want to use it and that your laptop was in a drawer.”

“Nope, no laptop, no TV. I’m not even sure I could get cable or internet out here.”

“No intrusions in your haven.”

Will didn’t reply to that, too close to the knuckle. “I have class tomorrow so I’ll look in my office… as long as Jack doesn’t drag me to a body.”

“Good luck,” said Hannibal raising his mug in a mock salute.

Will gave a bitter laugh and sipped his coffee. “How frequently do patients become enamored with you?”

“They come into my office and tell me their most private thoughts and memories and in return I do not judge them and keep their confidences. I listen, they are my sole focus, it’s not surprising that some become romantically attached to me.”

“That doesn’t answer the question.”

“About one in sixty.”

“That’s awkward.”

Hannibal shrugged. Will thought that nothing would ruffle Hannibal and that he really was more concerned about his patients’ well being than his own comfort. “You must have students who take a shine to you.” Will shook his head. “Never?” Will shook his head again. “You just don’t notice. None of them linger after class? No one visits you for no real reason during office hours?”

“I leave class quickly and I don’t have open office hours.”

“No office hours?”

“I have four hours a week wherein I go into my office and students can email me any questions. They don’t come into my office. It’s easier for me that way.”

“So really it is that you do not know which of your students harbor an affection for you. I assure you, Will, more than a few of them have had crushes over the years.”

Will chuckled and drank his coffee. It was nice to have a friend who he didn’t have to make an effort with. The dogs came and begged for attention and Hannibal smirked as he stroked

them. Will smiled at him. They finished the coffee and Will moved to make another pot but Hannibal said, “No more coffee, Will, I must be off home. I have appointments in the morning and you have class.”

Will nodded, “Good point. I have to be at the neurologist’s pretty early.”

They stood and Hannibal said, “How has your head been?”

“I had a really long hallucination yesterday and I’ve had a headache for most of today so I’m glad I’m going.”

“Does Jack know?”

Will nodded, “Yeah, we were at a crime scene. I couldn’t really keep it to myself. Garrett Jacob Hobbs was watching me try to work. I had to leave. Jack said he would call me for the next time. He told me to get my head together and talk to my neurologist.”

Hannibal looked at him, studied him as he took his jacket from Will’s coat rack. “I’m going to write a formal statement to the FBI saying that, in my medical opinion, you should not be in the field.”

“Thanks,” said Will. Will opened the door for him and said, “I’m really glad you came.”

“Thank you for a lovely dinner,” Hannibal smiled.

Will watched his car pull down his drive before shutting the door and going to the dishes. He was really screwed. He didn’t let himself fall into that other headspace. He spent so much time trying not to fall into murders’ heads and now he was fighting not to fall into a fiction. A man who knew what arugula was. A man who owned nice suits and probably had a nice, tastefully decorated townhouse somewhere in Baltimore. A man who had dogs but not seven of them. A man who had the right to kiss Hannibal. He breathed in through his nose and out through his mouth and didn’t grind his teeth. He dried the dishes and locked the doors before turning off the lights and going to bed. The dogs joined him in their own beds and a couple on his. He focused on breathing and not grinding his teeth.

His dreams were more pleasant but no more welcome than the nightmares. He woke up sticky the next morning and thought, “Great, I’m seventeen. That’s wonderful.” He shoved the sheets into the washing machine before taking a fast shower, cool because he had to share the water with the washer.

He dressed in a suit for class but drove over to the neurologist’s. He brought the exercise book she’d given him full of puzzles to retrain his brain. There was an MRI scan to take a look in his head then she looked over his work and listened to the symptoms he’d been having. After he was done she said, “You’re making great progress. I told you, when you were in the MRI for the first time, that this wouldn’t be easy.” She tapped the book, “I’m not taking away your car keys or putting you in the hospital. These things take time. If things start going backwards: more seizure, more frequent hallucinations or losing time, I’ll reconsider my prognosis. Right now you’re doing really well and you need to be patient. Your scans are fantastic, your spatial reasoning is progressing very well. Your brain just

needs time." She set him more daily exercises, more pages in the book. He felt better for knowing even if he wasn't overly comforted.

But driving over to school he started to think how good he felt. He didn't have a headache, he didn't feel nauseous, he didn't feel hot or ill at all. Epicureanism told him that the absence of pain was pleasure and until recently he hadn't believed that. He felt good and that made him feel great. He focused on how fine his body felt on how nice the Tom Waits on his stereo sounded and was in a wonderful mood by the time he got to school. None of his students tried to ask questions during his lecture on the uses of hair evidence. It was nice to talk about science for forty-five minutes. He talked; they took notes; his good mood continued.

As class was ending he heard the door open. He took a deep breath through his nose and hoped it wasn't Jack. He turned and saw Alana. The smile he felt spreading across his face was very real. "Hi," he said.

She smiled back, "Good mood, Will?"

"Do you know what the Epicurean theory of pleasure is?"

She nodded, "Pleasure is the freedom of the body from pain and the soul from confusion: pleasure is the opposite of misery, not a positive condition."

"Oh, it really is."

She smiled wider. "Well, I can keep that going. I have really good leftover turkey. I roasted it and then realized that I had no use for a whole roast turkey. So I'm trying to eat all of it before it goes bad." She pulled Tupperware from her purse. "Eat delicious sandwiches with me?"

"I would love that. But it's office hours. Can we eat in my office?"

"If you have to talk to students-"

"They don't come in," he interrupted. "They email me. It's just that I email them back almost instantly. It lets me interact with them and give them clear answers without having to deal with them face to face. It would have to be a semi-working lunch. Sorry."

"No, that sounds good to me. I don't mind if you don't mind."

"Great," said Will. He snapped his briefcase closed and smiled at her, focusing on the tip of her nose.

"You are one step away from whistling, aren't you?"

"I had a bad headache yesterday and too vivid dreams last night but I went to my neurologist this morning and had a good MRI scan and today I have no headache. Encephalitis can't get better over night, my neurologist reminded me of that this morning, so I'm taking today as a win."

"That's great," she looked genuinely pleased for him and Will led her to his office.

He unlocked the door to his office and said, “On top of all that you’ve brought yourself and delicious sandwiches. All I need is for someone to hand me a puppy and this will be the best day I’ve had since before I met Jack Crawford.” He turned on the light and ushered her in, closing the door behind himself.

“You don’t know they’re delicious.”

“I take you at your word,” he shrugged as he took his suit jacket off and hung it over the back of his desk chair. His desk was always neat and all he had to do was move one stack of papers. “You’ll get to see the stupid questions they ask. It really worrying that they’re the future of the FBI.”

“How stupid are they?” asked Alana.

“Shockingly.” She handed him one of the Tupperware containers. She got out a thermos and poured two glasses of iced tea from it. He took his first bite and said, “Whoa, that is really good.”

“I know. I didn’t believe Hannibal when he talked about brining but I tried it out because I was procrastinating with marking students’ papers.”

“I think I’ve been converted to brining,” he said taking another bite. “I’ve never cooked a turkey but if I did I would brine it.”

She laughed. His email dinged and he read it and rolled his eyes before turning the screen to her. She read it and said, “But you’re such a good teacher. This is second semester. How can he not know that?”

“There are more than a few of them that won’t pass.” He put down his sandwich to write back. “How are your students?”

“Mine are more acceptable.” Will laughed. “What case did you use today?”

“None,” he said. “I find my work with Jack to be distressing so I’ve stopped bringing it into my classroom. Today it was just science and when I need to use a case in the future I’ll use one I never touched. Sometimes I forget that I’m a scientist, start believing I’m a profiler. It’s nice to remember the science.”

“Smart, start taking your comfort zone back.”

Will nodded, “Yeah. I need it.”

“You’re doing so well, Will. A month ago I was scared for you and now look at you.”

He could see where she was going and, despite the moistness of the meat his mouth went dry. “Alana, I’m sorry,” he started. He didn’t know what to say. No one had ever been interested in him when he wasn’t interested in them.

She touched his hand and he raised his eyes to look at her. He could tell that she knew why he was apologizing. “We never made any promises, Will. It was an idea. It was a nice idea

but nothing more than an idea. Calm down. I'm not broken hearted and you haven't hurt our friendship; we're fine. I was going to suggest a date not ask you to be the father of my children."

"That's good. I'd be a terrible father."

She smiled, "So, what's her name?"

He thought about honesty, their friendship and how important she was to him and said, "Alana, before I met you I never had romantic feelings for a woman." She looked surprised and Will, trying not to get into her head, didn't know what she was thinking. He focused on her eyebrows. "I'm sorry if that offends you."

"Were you attempting to have romantic feelings for me or did you actually have them?"

"No, no, I wasn't faking it. I meant my romantic overtures to you."

"Then I'm flattered. I had a friend in college who was forever attempting to turn gay men straight for her… I almost want to look her up." Will laughed. "So what's his name?"

Will sighed, "I never see the point of that question. If you don't know him why would it matter?"

She didn't bristle, took it in her stride as she always did, "It's nice to put a name to a concept. I'd like to know the name of the man making you happy."

"I don't think he would make me happy. We're not dating; I don't even think he likes men. It just wouldn't be fair to date you when I'm so focused on him." She nodded and he said, "Hannibal."

"Hannibal?" she repeated.

"And I know he likes to cook, and owns beautiful things and nice clothes but I think that's because he's European, not gay." He glanced at her eyes and she looked more stunned than anything. "I wasn't his patient for long. It wouldn't be unethical and I like him in spite of the fact that he was my doctor, not because of it. I feel incredibly comfortable around him and enjoy his presence. With me," he paused, "social interactions take work. I like you and I enjoy the time we spend together but I have to think about what I'm saying and how to behave. I've done it my whole life, with friends, with boyfriends, colleagues. It takes work and it's worth it. But Hannibal, it's like being with my dogs or my father: it's effortless. And I ignored it until last night but I just can't anymore."

"What happened last night?"

He told her about the patient and the ruse and the arugula. She listened, considering it and he said, "Are you thinking that you wouldn't have handled a patient like that?"

"No, Hannibal and I have always had different approaches. His works for his patients mine works for mine… But Hannibal knows how your imagination works, how long it takes for you to fully disconnect from someone else's persona. Why would he ask you to pretend to be

his boyfriend if he didn't want you to think about being his boyfriend? And why would a man with Hannibal's social poise get confused and bring arugula to you when you were obviously making it up? I've known Hannibal for almost a decade. I've never known him to date a man but I've also never known him to make a social misstep. I'm not sure but, if I were you, I wouldn't be so certain about his disinterest." His email dinged and she said, "Good question or bad?" He read it, sighed and turned the screen for her to read it. "Oh dear."

"Want to swap students?"

"I'm pretty sure that's against the rules."

"I won't tell if you don't."

She laughed and popped the last bite on her sandwich into her mouth. "I should go. I have class."

"Thank you so much for lunch and I'm sorry."

"Don't be. You're my friend and I hope it works out for you. But, I do think that if Hannibal likes your food you should invite me over to dinner."

"Friday?"

"I'd say, 'It's a date,' but that might make you uncomfortable." He laughed and she smiled.

"Do you like fish?"

"I love it," she said, "Hannibal never asks he just presents you with things."

"Well, what I lack in his culinary expertise I make up for in southern manners," he smiled. "That's not true: I have terrible manners." He held out his empty Tupperware to her.

"I think they're unique," she said as she tucked the containers into her bag. "Never apologize for something that's out of your control, Will. You have a personality disorder but you always try your best. That is all any friend could ask for." She stood and said, "I'll see you Friday."

"Friday," he agreed as she left. Then he turned his attention to his email. His students were dumb. Between questions he looked at boats on Craig's list. There was one that was perfect. It needed a lot of work and only cost three hundred dollars. He wanted it so badly he could taste it: warm pennies and lead paint. He clicked through his cell phone's address book and hit send when he got to Hannibal's number. Hannibal picked up on the second ring and Will said, "Hi, are you busy?"

"No. I'm just writing notes. How are you, Will?"

"I'm great. How are you?"

"I'm very well."

"You were right about brining a turkey."

“I don’t recall us discussing brining.”

“We didn’t. Alana Bloom brined one and brought me a sandwich. It was the best turkey sandwich I’ve had in years.”

“Ah, and how is Alana?”

“She’s good. She asked me if I was ready for a relationship and wasn’t upset when I said that I didn’t want to date her. So, all in all, it was a great lunch.”

“That’s excellent, Will.”

“Yeah, I’m really pleased she isn’t angry. How’s your day?”

“Quietly, all of my patients this morning have been in good moods.”

“Good. I’m looking at boats.”

“Anything nice?”

“A lovely little one. It’s not actually that little. It could fit me and the dogs or me and four other people but it will still fit in my boatshed. It’s rundown but I could fix it.”

“Where is this slice of heaven?”

“Five miles outside of Baltimore.”

“You should see if the owner will let us pick it up on Saturday. We could do it in the afternoon before the opera.”

“Are you sure?”

“Of course, Will, I’d like to see the boat.”

“It’s not much to look at, yet.”

“I always like to see the meat before it’s cooked.”

Will chuckled, “Okay, I’ll give the guy a call.” They said their goodbyes and Will answered five more emails before guy who owned it.

The guy sounded sad and resigned as he said, “Are you scrapping it?”

“No,” said Will. “No, I’m going to fix it. I’m not buying it for the metal. How shredded is the motor?”

“It’s not working but I don’t know enough to know how bad it is.”

“Okay,” said Will.

The man agreed that Will could pick it up on Saturday said, “Do you have a trailer?”

“Yes, I have a trailer. I just don’t have a boat.”

“Good, because I have boat but no trailer.”

After hanging up Will went back to answering questions. Some weren’t stupid, some made his hopeful. His good mood stayed with him and in a lull he opened his latest work: a monograph about ligature marks. The work was calming in a way few other things were. This was where he was most competent in his professional life. Crime scenes were painful and classes weren’t always comfortable but writing was always his own. He didn’t need to focus on his breathing to write. He answered questions through email and wrote until his office hours were done. Then he shut the computer down and put his suit jacket back on.

It was sunny and cold out and Will liked it. He drove home where he played with his dogs before taking his pills. He took the dog for a long walk. They brought his sticks to throw and looked at him like he was a God. They went for over a mile before they turned back home.

He fed them their dinner before taking a shower. And after he toweled off he set the motor onto the table. Gutting it for parts would be calming. The phone rang and he picked it up saying, “Hi, Daddy.”

They talked about their days as Will worked. Will told him how great his body felt and how delicious brined turkey was. He told his dad about the boat and his father said, “Do you need me to call the bank and okay it?”

What would Beverly, who’d once asked if he was unstable, think if she knew that the court didn’t think Will was stable enough to control his own money? What would she think if she knew he was legally a minor? Jack knew. It was written on all his FBI forms: his signature to say he wanted to work there and his father’s to say he would allow it. Will thought of his stupid students and thought that the FBI had to be pretty desperate to take on them and a guy who was legally a thirty-two year-old child. But when you had a mind like Will’s employers were always willing to overlook some flaws.

And what would Hannibal think if he knew that his dad didn’t call him three times a week just to chat but because he was legally obligated to do so? His father loved him very dearly but, back before Will’s breakdown, they’d only spoken on Sundays. What would Hannibal think if he knew that the deed to Will’s haven of a home had his father’s name on it? Or that Will’s dad visited him three times a year without fail not because he missed him but because court papers made it necessary? Or that Will wasn’t afraid of hospitalization because of leaving the dogs but because his dad would have to come up? You can’t admit a minor without a parent’s consent. Surprisingly, Will didn’t think Hannibal would care.

Aloud he said, “No, you need to call the bank to okay transactions if it’s over a thousand. This is a little rust bucket Hannibal and I are driving over to some guy’s house to get. It won’t ping anything; the check will clear.”

“A rust bucket, huh?”

“It’s going to be such a nice project.”

“Maybe when I come visit you in a month I can come out on it.”

“I don’t think so. It’s hull needs some patching and its engine needs work and the whole body needs some repairs but you’ll get to look at it.”

“And how’s work?”

“Class is good, my latest monograph is coming along and Jack didn’t call me to a crime so it’s good.”

“How’s stuff with Jack going?”

“Okay. It’s just not as much fun as my real job. I need the project to distract me.”

“Honey, you could quit. You are financially secure. You don’t need another job.”

“I like helping people. We’re catching really terrible people.”

His dad sighed, “You help people. You train the FBI and you write papers that forensics labs all over the country use. You help people.”

“I’m doing more.”

“I just don’t want you to do too much. Last time you ended up in hospital and owning a dog worth a grand and a half.”

“I know,” Will nodded. “I know. No more pedigree puppies.”

“Will, the biggest problem wasn’t the dog.”

“No, because you made me sell the dog back.”

His dad sighed again, “Honey.” He hadn’t meant the dog; he’d meant the bit with the puddle of blood that had led Will first to a medical hospital and then to a mental hospital. He meant the bit where he’d sat at Will’s bedside and promised it would never be that bad again. The part where he told Will his plan — his foolproof idea — to make sure Will never felt alone or like he had to do anything all by himself. The part where he’d spoken to a lawyer and a judge and Will had agreed to have his rights striped away just so that he would always know his dad would be waiting to look after him. The bit where, after months of medical treatment, he’d moved home to his dad’s and taken a job at the docks and his father had given him a too thin dog found wandering around the port. Will’d fixed Harry’s problems, he thought, looking at the healthy dog sleeping on his couch. And fixing Harry’s problems had helped him heal his own wounds.

“If I feel like I’m going to have a breakdown I’ll quit.”

There was silence for a moment and then his dad said, “Honey, do you want me to come up there?”

“No, Daddy, I’m fine. I’m eating, I’m sleeping, I’m bathing, I’m walking my dogs and going to work. I’m fine.”

“Okay, but you just let me know if you start struggling.” He inhaled, clearly dropping the topic. He didn’t remind Will of just how bad things had gotten before. “How’s your new dog?”

“He’s not that new anymore. Winston’s settled in nicely and he only cost me the ten dollar license fee… do you at least agree that that puppy was adorable?”

“Completely adorable. But was he one thousand four hundred and ninety dollars cuter than Winston?”

“No, of course not.”

“Okay then.” They went back to chatting, his dad told him about the boats he’d been working on. They talked about the weather, about Alex’s mayoral campaign. He dismantled the entire engine and it was the only way he noticed the passing of time. Chats with his father always flew past. Will mentioned the idea of dinner and his father said, “I’ll let you go. But, honey, you call me if you need me and if this work even hints at becoming difficult you quit.”

“I will.”

“I’m glad you had such a good day.”

“It was fantastic,” Will agreed.

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